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PRESS RELEASE

UNITED STATES AND TAJIKISTAN EXTEND COOPERATION TO IMPROVE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATION

DUSHANBE, TAJIKISTAN - On May 23, 2006 Mr. Abduljabbor Rahmonov, Minister of Education, of the Republic of Tajikistan and Peter Argo, Country Director, of the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) signed an agreement to extend the Participation, Education and Knowledge Strengthening Program (PEAKS) for one and a half years. The PEAKS program, which began in 2003, will continue to assist the Government of Tajikistan to improve the quality of primary and secondary education. Funded through the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the \$4.8 million program was originally funded for three years from 2003-2006; however, the agreement signed today will enable collaboration in basic education to continue until 2007. The program is implemented through a consortium of partners managed by the Academy for Educational Development. Partners include Abt Associates, Open Society Institute Assistance Foundation, and Save the Children U.S. and U.K.

During the last year and a half of the program, PEAKS' focus will be on providing support to the Ministry of Education to implement the 2006-2015 National Strategy for Education Development, particularly in the areas of teacher training and the expansion of a new model for financing schools. In teacher training, the program will expand teachers' access to new methods that they can use throughout the curriculum to improve students' ability to apply knowledge both in educational settings and in the workforce. International experience has shown that shifting the focus from rote memorization is critical to ensure that students are prepared for work under the circumstances of globalization. The rising cost of education is another challenge to governments around the world. During the first three years, the program worked with the Ministry of Education and Ministry of Finance to develop a new model for school finance that will help to cope with rising costs and limited available resources. The new model is operating in Kulyab city, Khujand, Vakhdat, Khorog, and Yavan. The extension will allow for further development of the model, and training for school staff on how to manage their schools and budget resources.

USAID assistance in basic education already impacts more than 42,000 students studying in 104 schools throughout the country. The centerpiece of the program is the Professional Development School (PDS) that operates as school-based teacher training center with the support of district and Teacher Training Institute methodologists. Teachers from surrounding schools travel to the 23 core schools to observe teachers' use of the new methods. More than 1,500 teachers have received training to date. While teachers play a key role in education quality, school administrators and the school community are also critical to improve educational quality. USAID has provided training to more than 450 school directors to help them better manage their schools, and worked with more than 75 communities to prioritize their needs and develop strategies to address them.

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